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The mayors of Milwaukee, Racine, Green Bay, Sheboygan and Superior are opposing a plan that will allow petroleum giant BP to boost the amount of pollution it's dumping into Lake Michigan from an Indiana refinery.

Buy a link here"As mayors of cities that sit on the Great Lakes, we are gravely concerned that the quality and environmental protection of the entire Great Lakes system has been placed in serious jeopardy by this decision," the group wrote in a letter Tuesday to the commissioner of the Indiana Department of Environmental Management.

Indiana approved the permit for discharges last month as part of an expansion of the Whiting, Ind., refinery's fuel-producing capacity. The approval, according to BP, is part of a \$3 billion expansion at the refinery that will let it increase its annual production of gasoline and diesel by 15%, or 620 million gallons. The upgrade will also allow the refinery to rely more on Canadian crude oil.

Wisconsin mayors aren't the only ones upset by the new permit. It will let BP discharge 1,584 pounds of ammonia a day and 4,925 pounds of other industrial waste a day, according to Illinois Congressman Mark Kirk's office. The result, he says, is an increase from current allowable discharges of 54% for ammonia and a 35% increase for what conservationists term "sludge" and what BP and state regulators refer to as "total suspended solids."

"BP should live up to the millions of dollars it spends on advertising to convince the public that they are environmentally friendly," Kirk, a Republican, said in written statement Friday. "No one argues against increasing our refinery capacity, but it should not come at the expense of the drinking water of 40 million people."

Illinois Congressman Rahm Emanuel, a Democrat, and Michigan Congressman Vern Ehlers, a Republican, last week introduced a resolution urging the State of Indiana to reconsider the decision. That resolution was scheduled to be taken up by Congress late Tuesday.

BP officials contend they will still be operating within terms of the Clean Water Act, and they note they are spending \$150 million in environmental protection upgrades as part of the expansion.

Thomas Easterly, commissioner of the Indiana Department of Environmental Management, said the increase in ammonia discharges is still only half of what the federal government allows.

That does little to assuage leaders of Wisconsin's coastal communities. The mayors contend that Indiana bypassed the federal Clean Water Act, as well as its own state laws, when it approved the increased discharge.

"The circumvention of both federal and state laws to increase pollution into Lake Michigan sets a terrible precedent and exposes the entire Great Lakes region to unacceptable environmental degradation," the mayors wrote Tuesday. "Cities such as Milwaukee, Racine, Green Bay, Sheboygan, Superior and many, many more all depend on Lake Michigan for drinking water, economic activity and recreation."